



Lessons of the Masters

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When we talk about education today, we tend to avoid the rhetoric of "mastery," with its erotic and inegalitarian overtones. But the charged personal encounter between master and disciple is precisely what interests George Steiner in this book, a sustained reflection on the infinitely complex and subtle interplay of power, trust, and passions in the most profound sorts of pedagogy. Based on Steiner's Norton Lectures on the art and lore of teaching, "Lessons of the Masters" evokes a host of exemplary figures, including Socrates and Plato, Jesus and his disciples, Virgil and Dante, Heloise and Abelard, Tycho Brahe and Johann Kepler, the Baal Shem Tov, Confucian and Buddhist sages, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, Nadia Boulanger, and Knute Rockne.

Pivotal in the unfolding of Western culture are Socrates and Jesus, charismatic masters who left no written teachings, founded no schools. In the efforts of their disciples, in the passion narratives inspired by their deaths, Steiner sees the beginnings of the inward vocabulary, the encoded recognitions of much of our moral, philosophical, and theological idiom. He goes on to consider a diverse array of traditions and disciplines, recurring throughout to three underlying themes: the master's power to exploit his student's dependence and vulnerability; the complementary threat of subversion and betrayal of the mentor by his pupil; and the reciprocal exchange of trust and love, of learning and instruction between master and disciple.

Forcefully written, passionately argued, "Lessons of the Masters" is itself a masterly testament to the high vocation and perilous risks undertaken by true teacher and learner alike.

Lessons of the Masters Details

Date : Published April 1st 2005 by Harvard University Press (first published 2003)

ISBN : 9780674017672

Author : George Steiner

Format : Paperback 198 pages

Genre : Education, Philosophy, Literature, Writing, Essays, Nonfiction

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From Reader Review Lessons of the Masters for online ebook

Mleczny says

Termino este libro con una sensación algo agridulce.

Por una parte, es una fuente fértil en reflexiones, referencias y conocimiento. A través del recorrido que hace por algunos ejemplos de la relación maestro-discípulo, incide en todo un abanico de cuestiones que distintas ramas de la filosofía han discutido durante siglos. Para legos en humanidades, como yo, es fascinante descubrir nuevas preguntas y, a la vez, explorar las respuestas que han dado sabios de distintas sociedades.

Por otra parte, sin embargo, algunas de las referencias o "mini-historias" requieren una cierta base de literatura, historia y filosofía que no todo lector tiene y me he quedado con la sensación de no haber aprovechado totalmente el libro.

Este es, pues, un libro que, dependiendo de la base cultural del lector, requiere un cierto esfuerzo de reflexión, documentación y comprensión. En mi opinión, ese esfuerzo merece la pena (8/10).

Diego Gomez says

Este libro es una compilación de una serie de clases sobre la labor de enseñar, dictadas por Steiner en la Universidad de Harvard.

A lo largo de estas lecciones, Steiner con gran lucidez hace un análisis profundo y comparativo de diversos aspectos como la enseñanza oral y escrita, los grandes maestros de la historia, la relación maestro – discípulo, los maestros en filosofía, religión, artes y ciencias, etc, la enseñanza en la modernidad.

Su análisis siempre tiene ejemplos puntuales y trata casos específicos, lo cual convierte este ensayo en una lección muy iluminadora, en la que Steiner saca conclusiones lúcidas y fundamentadas.

Por este libro desfilan ilustres personajes como Sócrates, Jesús, Platón, Aristóteles, Kepler, Kafka, Alain, Popper, Baal Shem Tov y tantos otros con anécdotas reveladoras y algunas veces contradictorias de sus propias enseñanzas.

Eric says

The funny thing about Steiner is that he can do both expansive erudition AND terse expression. He packs so much into his short sentences; these lectures were a dizzying read.

Sigfried says

I have to take it on faith that half the references are apt and are adding layers to his relatively simple arguments. I am not nearly erudite enough to refute or agree with the the format, presentation, or assertions

made in this book. I suppose the intended audience comprises specialists and "hardcore" literary academics. Digression: This is part of the problem, when the those that love the craft (both in reading and creating) alienate themselves from the common people. Education at it's heart and soul is a very liberal and pragmatic endeavor, and for any group to entrance themselves with their own hall of mirrors effectively makes you impotent to the people you are trying to serve. Wait...I guess this book did teach me something about teachers after all.

Marinella Simone says

Uno dei migliori libri che ho letto in questi ultimi mesi.

Ricco e profondo, affronta una delle relazioni più importanti della nostra vita: quella tra maestro e allievo, portando anche casi esemplari delle diverse modalità con cui questa relazione può svilupparsi nel tempo, con modalità a volte distruttive.

sofia says

Anche il possesso di un corpo è poca cosa se lo si paragona al timore di due mani che si poggiano sul vivo di un altro essere umano che si schiude, un atto implicito nell'insegnamento. Un maestro è l'amante geloso di ciò che potrebbe essere.

Carlos says

Tras veinticinco años de ejercer la docencia, George Steiner concibió estas “Lecciones de los maestros”, una exquisita reflexión “en torno a uno de los misterios clave del ser humano como especie biológica y cultural: la historia del saber, la historia de la paideia y de la pedagogía, la teología de la enseñanza”, como discierne a su vez Adolfo Castañón.

Los textos reunidos en este volumen –las prestigiosas Eliot Norton Lectures que Steiner impartió en Harvard entre 2001 y 2002– son un asombroso encuentro de mentores y alumnos, una cadena de enseñanza que va de Pitágoras a Empédocles, de Sócrates a Platón a Aristóteles, de Virgilio a Dante, o de Husserl a Heidegger, amén de recuperar documentos y personajes capitales en torno de la interacción maestro-discípulo, como los textos bíblicos y la Torá, San Agustín, Montaigne, Shakespeare o personalidades intelectuales más recientes, como Thomas Mann, Paul Valéry, Saul Bellow, Fernando Pessoa y Yasunari Kawabata, entre muchísimos más.

Por ello Manuel Arranz afirma: “...si la palabra escrita no escucha a quien la lee, quien lee sí la escucha a ella en cambio. Alain, el único filósofo para quien el apelativo ‘maestro de pensamiento’ no es un eufemismo retórico, aconsejaba: ‘Es preciso leer y releer a los Maestros: Platón, Aristóteles, Montaigne, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel, Comte y Marx. Leerlos y releerlos como contemporáneos, en cierto sentido, entre sí pero también nuestros’. Hoy sólo tendríamos que añadir algunos nombres a la lista. El de Steiner sería uno de ellos”.

julieta says

Lo amé. La mente brillante de Steiner se mete por los caminos de la pedagogía, entrando a esa relación entre maestros y discípulos, esas relaciones que han sido famosas, maestros sobresalientes, desde Sócrates, Jesús, hasta maestros como Nadia Boulanger, o Alain.

Siempre me ha atraído el mundo de la pedagogía, y esa relación que se crea entre dos personas cuando uno enseña, otro aprende. Una delicia de principio a fin.

Gregg says

I glommed onto this particular tome in a reference Alan Bennet made in an interview several years ago. A depressing amount of Steiner's arguments sailed harmlessly over my head; he uses allusions and casual references to Ovid, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche *et al* with an ease I can only envy (at least, at this point). Still, his monologue on the Teacher/Student relationship is worthy of consideration, especially in today's politically-charged pedagogical climate. In no particular order, going over this book in the only fashion I feel I could pull off worth a damn, I give you:

What I learned from George Steiner

1. The transmission of knowledge is inherently erotic. I'm not sure how. Steiner argues that the student's intellectual submission before the Master is charged with *eros*, and to overlook this potential disaster/boon (witness Socrates and Alciabades, Abelard and Heloise, Plato and any boy with pecs...) is naive and limiting. I don't think current laws allow me to explore this matter any further. And Steiner, you'd better stay the hell away from my third hour.
2. A teacher can measure his success by his disciples' ultimate rejection of his tenets. "To teach greatly is to awaken doubts in the pupil, to train for dissent. It is to school the disciple for departure...A valid Master should, at the close, be alone." I buy that.
3. The study of the humanities is at odds with that of science and math. It's ridiculous to argue that we'd be bereft of radiation without Madame Curie, but we would not have the Sistine Chapel without Michaelangelo. I'd have to respectfully disagree here. Read Tom Stoppard: "What we lose to history will be picked up along the way...or rewritten in a completely different language. You should no more grieve the loss (of the books of Alexandria) than you should a shoelace lost on the sidewalk." (Paraphrased)
4. High school teachers suck. We have a "subconsciously vengeful mediocrity" and are "more or less amiable gravediggers" *a la* Yorrick. Hey, Steiner, no offense, but fuck off, all right? If you had any material on presentation besides lectures and q&a, I might be impressed.
5. We can thank Goethe for the eternal credo: "He who cannot, teaches." I'd cuss him out too, were he not already 176 years dead.
6. The charged relationship between Master and Disciple is dangerous (it can result in castration, like with Abelard and Heloise), a case of one-upmanship (Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler; Max Brod and Franz Kafka); it can seduce and destroy you (Mephistopheles and Faustus); it can kill you (Socrates); you can be

good at it and still reviled (the strange, sad case of Georges Palante); yet all of these dizzying possibilities underscore the raw power, responsibility and rush (my new three R's of education) of the one profession without which there would be no other professions.

7. It is extremely difficult to figure a rate of exchange for sharing one's passions with students. At least, in the academic world.

8. Some teachers have had stringent requirements for their students, sometimes to their detriment (Pythagoras), sometimes beneficially so (Zen masters).

9. The fact that I need to reread this book (a third time, I might add) to even come close to absorbing it satisfactorily, is a testament to both my failures as a teacher, and my doggedness, which is one of my greatest assets as a teacher.

10. I have *so* got to read the following stories: "The Lesson of the Master," Henry James; "Of This Time, Of That Place" (author?); "The Lesson and the Secret" (author?); *The Dying Animal*, Philip Roth.

Kay says

I have to admit since reading Tolstoy or Dostoevsky I have become a George Steiner junkie. I can't stop reading his books. I am so in awe of his erudition and his thought process. In *Lessons of the Masters* he is more interested in the relationships between masters and their acolytes than the lessons. It took me realize where he was going with this book but it proved to be an encyclopedic review of famous master student relations from Socrates on. Steiner looks at the arts, the sciences, Rabbi Akiba to the Bal Shem Tov, and a brief look at Eastern philosophies and religions.

W says

I have fallen in the habit of taking a book with me to church, which I suppose is better than falling out of the habit of going at all. It is arrogant, but after suffering through so many years of empty, vacant sermons, it seems an excusable conceit. It is not as if I couldn't put the book down should things get interesting.

Meanwhile, I have read some great biographies: of Teresa, Juan de la Cruz, Francis, and some interesting spiritual reading, such as the *Holy Longing*.

Anyway, I knew Steiner wouldn't quite fit the mold, but the topic is discipleship and the association of Jesus and Master was enough to persuade to sneak the book through the doors. And its not as if it didn't have a moral lesson: its cover art is a cut from Regnault's *Socrates Pulling Alcibiades Away from Sensual Pleasure*. It is a demanding and highly philosophical (which, for Steiner, generally involves Heidegger) look at the relationship of teachers and pupils through the histories of some rather famous relationships: Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Pythagoras and on through Moses, Jesus, Paul and Augustine and then Dante and Shakespeare all the way down to Freud, Sartre, Strauss, and Popper.

He states that genuine teaching is a dangerous enterprise, and quotes Walter Benjamin in defining teaching as an exercise that occurs between the lines, an act of disclosure. He nervously explores the erotic tension that exists between master and disciple, wherein the transmission of knowledge and learning demands an intimate submission/trust. His focus on Dante and the transmission of knowledge in the *Divine Comedy* could easily, and probably should be, read in church. Marlowe's *Faustus* conveys the danger of teaching, as

does his study of Heidegger in Nazi Germany. The book is always profound, and exactly what a teacher of thirty years would enjoy. Steiner says, "...to teach, to teach well, is to be an accomplice to transcendent possibility." Ah, to know a student who could draw out that possibility. But, for teaching skills? Not so much.

John Jr. says

Rewarding essays on teaching and learning, derived from a series of lectures. Impressive for their great depth and breadth, also for the ease of the writing and hence of the reading.

A relatively personal note: One figure discussed here is the French teacher of the mid-20th century known to practically everyone in France at the time as "Alain." He was an instructor to and early influence on Simone Weil, with whom I became fascinated a few years ago. He was discussed, but rather briefly, in at least one biography of her, so it was a pleasure to learn more about him here.
